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EXPERT GUIDANCE TO THE COLLECTIONS OF THE MUSEUM

ALMOST everyone who has entered the great galleries of Europe in an earnest spirit and with limited time has longed for the aid of some one who could guide them quickly to what they wished to see and give them any needed information with assurance of its accuracy. Directors and Curators could give this aid but they have other and more important duties, and the importunate and persistent "Official guides" who press their services upon the stranger at the entrance of such great museums as the Louvre are abhorrent to any student or lover of art. Nor is this desire confined to travelers and strangers. Those who are most at home in any great city may be the greatest strangers to its art collections. Indeed, it is from old-time residents of New York and those who have long been members of our Museum that the demand for expert guidance in examining its collections is most urgent.

The need is various. There is the serious student who wishes to center his observation on particular objects or classes of objects, to know where to find them quickly and perhaps to give them a more careful examination than could be made if they remained in their cases. There is the amateur who wishes to see the chief objects of interest in the Museum, and to have some one who can perform the function for which his European Baedeker uses the star or double star, but with more intelligence and sympathy. There are the teachers who want to know what objects in the Museum they should see, and how they should see them in order that they may be able to interest their pupils and put themselves in position to use the object lessons of the Museum.

It is to meet all these needs and to relieve other members of its staff from duties that have become onerous, that the Museum has appointed Mrs. Lucy O. Perkins to a position on its staff. She will be prepared to show the collections under expert guidance to members and visitors by previous appointment, whether the

purpose be a general visit or inspection of particular collections or of particular objects. This service will be free to members and to teachers in the public schools, as well as to scholars under their guidance. To all others a charge of twenty-five cents per person will be made, with a minimum charge of one dollar an hour. This charge is made in the belief that those who desire this service should bear some part of its cost and in order to bring within reasonable limits the demands upon the time of the Instructor.

The appointment of a special officer to this kind of a position is no new departure in Museum practice, though something of a novelty. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the American Museum of Natural History in New York have already set the example.

R. W. DE F.

A MADONNA AND CHILD

BY

GIOVANNI BELLINI

THE Madonna and Child by Giovanni Bellini which is reproduced here is the most important work of the Venetian school which the Museum has yet acquired. It has not hitherto been known to writers on art and is therefore of peculiar interest as being yet one more revelation of the artist's inexhaustible fertility of invention in treating this the commonest theme of Italian art.

The picture is on a poplar wood panel in oil and measures $35\frac{1}{8} \times 28\frac{5}{16}$ inches. In front of a dull orange-red curtain, the Madonna is seated holding the Infant Christ in both hands. Her mantle is a pure intense blue, the undergarment is dull purplish red, the headdress white. The flesh color is luminous and of a warm ivory tint. In front is a marble balustrade on which is the signature JOANNES BELLINUS, the second L being, as in the majority of authentic signatures by the artist, longer than the first. The curtain is drawn aside to the spectator's left, revealing behind the Madonna's figure the outskirts of a small

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hill town; a winding road, a constant motive in Bellini's landscapes, leads towards the houses which have chimneys in the Venetian fashion; there is a single fortress tower, and beyond, a vista of mountain ranges stretches away to the pale blue distance. The sky is deep blue above, becoming paler towards the horizon where a slightly orange flush indicates the approach of evening; a few thin dark clouds cut sharply upon the sky, their under edges lit by the low sun. The whole color scheme is rather cool, and the harmony of blue, dull red and white, upon which it is built, is at once austere and rich.

The Virgin's face is beautiful but somewhat inexpressive in its repose; there is not here, as sometimes in Bellini, that intense expression of a particular mood which distinguishes his greatest renderings of the theme. But what is lacking in the face is made up for in the hands; the gentle solicitude with which the left hand supports the Child's head and the tender caressing touch of the right hand are remarkable even in the work of an artist who more than any other Italian gave to his hands their full share in the total expression of character and mood.

The poetical idea which underlies the picture is a distinct and interesting one, one that in less discreet hands might have degenerated into the obvious and sentimental. The Child is represented as surprised by the sound of angel voices in the air and looking up with a sudden movement of delighted wonder, which is expressed also in the eyes and the half-open mouth. That this is no fanciful interpretation of the picture may be gathered by comparing it with another example in the Accademia at Venice, where with many differences of arrangement and a quite different type of Virgin the same Child is seen in almost the same attitude; but in this case the cause of his delight is made evident in the crowd of cherub heads that loom out of the dark twilight sky.

There is reason to think that our version of the theme is the earlier one and one may almost venture to guess that when Bellini took up a second time the

treatment of this "conceit," he had in mind criticisms of the obscurity of his previous rendering and determined to place the matter beyond doubt by making the angel voices visible.

It may be of some interest to endeavor to fix approximately the date of this work and its place in the long sequence of Bellini's Madonnas. As it is painted in oil it is not likely that it can be earlier than the early part of the seventies of the fifteenth century, the period at which Antonello da Messina's visit to Venice first disseminated there the knowledge of the new medium; nor would the general evidence of style point to an earlier date. The early Madonnas in tempera, of which Mr. J. G. Johnson's, Mr. Theodore M. Davis's, Prince Trivulzio's and Signor Frizzoni's are the most important, all have a more intense and tragic feeling than is to be found in our example. This then belongs to the later and far larger series which beginning probably in the later seventies extend almost to the end of Bellini's life. In this later series there is a constant increase in the sensuous splendor of color and in the research for atmospheric envelopment, but this is accompanied by a continual loss of the firmness and constructive power in the drawing.

Now in our example the drawing, on the one hand, is still precise and firm, but, on the other, the color is still cool and there is as yet none of that rich enveloping glow of warm light in which Bellini bathed his late pictures, preparing, thereby, the way for Giorgione and Titian. Though ours is painted in oil it still recalls something of the cool ivory-like quality of the tempera Madonnas.

It would seem then that our picture must come quite early in the series, and this is made the more likely in that it agrees particularly well with the Turin Madonna which the present writer years ago placed, as internal evidence, to this exact period, namely, the end of the seventies or the early eighties.*

Bellini's Madonnas can to some extent be grouped by the type of the face, by the

**Giovanni Bellini. By Roger E. Fry. The Unicorn Press, London, 1900.*

actual model that posed to him, and this particular face with the long thin oval and somewhat bird-like eyes occurs in the Turin picture and in the closely allied "Madonna with the Child standing in the act of Benediction" of the Venice Academy. The same model seems to have been used for the "Madonna and Child before a Curtain" with a distant landscape in the Morelli collection at Bergamo.

One more reason for giving it this approximate date is to be found in the landscape. In his early works, Bellini's ideas of mountains were derived from the Euganean hills which were the most accessible from Venice. About 1475 he must have gone to Pesaro to paint the large altarpiece still to be seen in that town. While there he, no doubt, would have made notes of the scenery of the Apennines. The general character of this landscape is much more that of the Apennines than of any country nearer to Venice and though from habit Bellini gave to the chimneys their familiar Venetian shape, one can hardly doubt that the scene is one that he had become familiar with in his journey to Pesaro, and that therefore there is a likelihood that it was painted not very long after his return to Venice.

A variant of this composition by Bellini's pupil, Niccolo Rondinello, exists in the collection of Sir Frederick Cook.

The picture is fortunately in a remarkably fine state of preservation. R. E. F.

A PEDESTAL OF THE PLATFORM OF THE PEACOCK THRONE

THE zenith of the Mogul style was reached under the Emperor Shah Jehan, who reigned in Delhi from 1628 to 1658. His palace, described by the great historian of Indian Art, was the most magnificent palace in the East and probably in the world, and was of great extent, occupying a space—almost a regular parallelogram—of 1,600

feet east and west by 3,200 feet north and south. Built at once, and on a regular plan, it exhibits a consistent example of the art of the period, and the only fault with which it has been charged is the wealth of its ornamentation, rather than the quality, which is the highest form of Indo-Persian decoration developed under the Mogul rulers of India.

"The principal entrance faces the Chandni Chowk, a noble, wide street, nearly a mile long, planted with two rows of trees, and with a stream of water running down its center. Entering within its deeply-recessed portal, you find yourself beneath the vaulted

hall, the sides of which are in two stories, and with an octagonal break in the center. This hall, which is 375 feet in length over all, has very much the effect of the nave of a gigantic Gothic cathedral, and forms the noblest entrance known to belong to any existing palace. At its inner end this hall opened into a courtyard, 350 feet square;



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MOGUL THRONE